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MONITORING OF INTERNATIONAL PLANS AND PROGRAMMES OF ACTION

Major issues and programme activities of the United Nations Secretariat and the regional commissions relating to social development and welfare and specific social groups

Report of the Secretary-General

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INTRODUCTION

1. The provisional agenda of the Commission for Social Development at its thirty-third session, as approved by the Economic and Social Council in its decision 1991/226, includes an item entitled "Monitoring of international plans and programmes of action". Under this item the Commission, in accordance with the terms of the annex to its resolution 31/3, 1/ will monitor international plans and programmes of action, particularly in the areas of social welfare, youth, ageing and disabled persons, review concurrently the activities of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, and receive reports from the regional commissions and relevant expert group meetings. The Commission will base its discussions on a report of the Secretary-General summarizing the substantive issues and related United Nations activities in the relevant areas, as well as on other reports that the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council may refer to the Commission for its consideration.

2. The present report has been prepared in response to Commission resolution 31/3. 1/ It contains summaries of the substantive issues relating to social development and welfare, youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family, and related United Nations activities at the global level. An addendum to the present report contains a summary of issues and related United Nations activities at the regional level.

I. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND WELFARE

A. Summary of substantive issues

3. The biennium 1991-1992 has thrown up some extraordinary challenges for social policy, few of them predicted. In several important respects, the period also marks an important turn in trends and thinking about social policy.

4. As was observed in the report submitted to the Commission at its thirty-second session, the world economy, evolving over a long period into an ever-tighter system, has put increasing strains on its weakest parts and exposed them to recurrent crises and major segments of their populations to marginal roles; efforts by countries to restructure and adjust their economies to changing realities brought, in the short and medium term at least, heavy social costs (see E/CN.5/1991/3 and Corr.1, para. 5). A measure of the lowered expectations is that after successive rounds of adjustment, the mere resumption of growth, modest in most cases in Africa and Latin America, was considered a success.

5. Developing countries also faced longer-term problems, such as the consequences of continued rapid population growth in some, massive migration and growth of urban areas in others, beyond the capacity of authorities to deal with them. Many countries experienced catastrophic environmental deterioration and social, ethnic and political strife, often in the form of open warfare.

6. Another particular feature of the period was the spread of the crisis - previously confined to the economically weaker countries - to the stronger economies, some at the very core of the global system. Lingering recession, lack of confidence and high and rising unemployment rates are some of the manifestations of this crisis in the developed countries.

7. The dramatic political and social changes in eastern and central Europe and the former Soviet Union, marking a transition from central planning and direction in many spheres of life and society, have brought with them severe dislocations and substantially reduced levels of material living standards for the vast majority of the people. They have also created much uncertainty regarding who is to be responsible for administering and funding social benefits and services that were in the past universally or widely available, and for ensuring guaranteed employment, long established as one of the social pillars of the State.

8. In the past decade, the world-wide debate on the role of Governments as organizers of economic activity and promoters of the welfare of citizens has been dominated by the pro-market proponents of fewer government controls. In the context of social concerns, the dominant view in recent years has been that Governments should place less emphasis on the provision and delivery of services and do more to promote their role as welfare and set standards. Recently, a new willingness has emerged to consider more pro-active social policies aimed at improving the context in which opportunities are created and services organized as part of a broader reorientation of policy towards greater social balance.

9. In the period under review, perceptions of the strategic value of social policy have begun to converge. In many countries, the emphasis is being placed on support for participatory, community and family-based social welfare policies, and partnership between a more efficient, transparent and accountable public sector and an energetic and effective private sector.

B. Programme activities

10. In connection with the monitoring of follow-up to the Interregional Consultation on Developmental Social Welfare Policies and Programmes, at which the Guiding Principles for Developmental Social Welfare Policies and Programmes in the Near Future had been adopted (see E/CONF.80/10, chap. III), reports were prepared for submission to the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session (A/46/414) and at its forty-eighth session, through the Economic and Social Council (A/48/-- -E/1993/6). Several technical publications are also being prepared, based in part on national experience. They deal with the decentralization and localization of social welfare activities, the improvement of cooperation between the public and private sectors and between modern and traditional, or indigenous, approaches to social dysfunction, ways of strengthening family and other kinship-based social support systems and the methodology of measurement of the returns on social welfare and other social expenditure.

11. As a contribution to the International Year for the World's Indigenous People, the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs has prepared a study of national experience in the formulation of social policies specifically adapted to the condition of indigenous people, with a view to preparing draft guidelines at a later date for a national social policy for indigenous people.

12. In support of these activities a social welfare database has been established. Issuance of the biennial Social Development Newsletter recommenced in 1991 after a three-year gap. Published in English, French and Spanish, the Newsletter was distributed to 6,000 specialized governmental and non-governmental institutions. Work is continuing on the "social perspective"

of development, particularly in the context of making social development cooperation more effective. Some of the ideas being put forward are discussed in document E/1993/5.

13. The Centre organized an expert group meeting on the social consequences of population growth and changing social conditions, with particular emphasis on the family, which took place at Vienna from 21 to 25 September 1992. (For the report of the meeting, see document E/CN.5/1993/6.) In conjunction with the Department of Economic and Social Development and the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority, the Centre also organized an international symposium on social services in major cities, held at Bangkok in December 1991. It contributed also to the preparations for an international expert meeting with the topic "Towards a Competitive Society in Central and Eastern Europe: Social Dimensions" held at Kellokoski (Finland) from 20 to 22 September 1992. It is supporting preparations for the Conference of Ministers and Responsible for Social Affairs, Social Welfare and Family Matters within the European Region, to be convened from 21 to 25 June 1993 at Bratislava.

14. The Centre continued to act as the focal point within the United Nations Secretariat for activities to promote and advance cooperatives; in that context it represented the United Nations in the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC) and prepared the report of the Secretary-General on the status and role of cooperatives in the light of new economic and social trends (A/47/216-E/1992/43).

15. Staff of the Centre carried out advisory missions on social policy and social welfare issues under various programmes of multilateral technical cooperation to Belarus, Chad, China, Indonesia, Lesotho, Oman and the Russian Federation.

16. The Interregional Adviser on Social Policies and Development went on missions to Albania, Bolivia, Colombia, Cyprus, Ecuador, El Salvador, Lesotho, Mauritius, Morocco, Niger, Paraguay, the Philippines, Poland, the Republic of Korea, Swaziland and the United Republic of Tanzania.

17. In January 1991, with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Centre organized a high-level mission to the Russian Federation, led by Sir Alan Peacock, to advise on needed social measures in the transition to a market economy. A report outlining the major issues discussed was subsequently issued for wider dissemination.*

18. A Government-executed project, funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under the Social Dimensions of Adjustment programme in the United Republic of Tanzania, is now entering its third year. With the assistance of University College, London, the Centre is responsible for the development and implementation of the training component. Training in socially sensitive policy and social planning is being made available to officials in the Planning Commission, and to the staff of line ministries, local government and non-governmental organizations. Other elements of the project include the preparation of training materials and the upgrading of national training capacity.

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*Copies, in English only, are available from the Centre on request.

19. A multidisciplinary working group on the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), comprising representatives of relevant substantive units of the Centre and of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme, was established at Vienna to coordinate activities and make joint contributions to the United Nations system-wide response to the disease. Members of the working group have participated in various meetings and conferences, including the World Health Organization (WHO) consultation on prisons and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/AIDS, held at Geneva from 15 to 17 September 1992; the United Nations International Drug Control Programme's Special Inter-Agency Consultation on Drug Abuse and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/AIDS, held at Vienna on 17 September 1992; the UNDP Task Force on Simulation, Decision-making and Programming for HIV and Development, held at Vienna from 21 to 24 September 1992; and the fifth meeting of the Interagency Advisory Group on AIDS, held at United Nations Headquarters from 3 to 4 November 1992.

II. YOUTH

A. Summary of substantive issues

20. The period since the International Youth Year in 1985 has been characterized by major political, economic and socio-cultural changes. For young people, perhaps more than for other sectors of the population, such a period of transition presents new opportunities but also problems. In this regard, the General Assembly, in its resolution 45/103, identified a number of issues of direct concern to young people to be given priority in the implementation of the guidelines for further planning and suitable follow-up in the field of youth: education, employment, hunger, drug abuse, disease, including AIDS, and the deterioration of the environment. These priority areas have also been selected as the basis for the elaboration of the draft world youth programme of action towards the year 2000 and beyond, which is before the Commission in document E/CN.5/1993/10.

21. A survey of the global situation of youth, in final preparation, indicates that progress towards universal education and literacy has been made in many developing countries. Projections indicate that this progress will continue in the 1990s, although the number of illiterates will grow and many countries will probably still be unable to provide universal primary education by the year 2000. The survey shows that curricula often fail to correspond to the challenges facing young people and that the linkage of education with economic, social and cultural realities and with the requirements of the labour market is inadequate. The special needs and problems of young women and of groups in marginal situations have not received appropriate attention, particularly the need to promote vocational training and equality of opportunity for job seekers.

22. Unemployment and under-employment among youth are common problems, which will be exacerbated by a continuing influx of young people into the employment market. Employment schemes for school-leavers or unemployed youth have been set up by many countries. Several Governments have improved employment services for young people, including information and counselling, while others have promoted active youth participation in decisions concerning youth employment activities. Some Governments have also strengthened their efforts to integrate disadvantaged and marginal groups of youth into economic activities. Special measures may still be required to create employment, and particularly

the self-employment of young people, especially in areas where birth rates remain stubbornly high.

23. Hunger has increased in many parts of the world; it is a threat to people of any age, but its impact may be most seriously felt by young people and children. Large numbers of young people have suffered from hunger and malnutrition since birth, and this deprivation may, among other things, cause impaired physical and intellectual development. Youth have not played a key role in combating hunger and malnutrition and Governments have missed opportunities to promote youth participation in agricultural production through the encouragement of policies and programmes that make farming more rewarding and life in rural areas more attractive. Training in agricultural skills that will promote income generation is still inadequate, and young people do not have ready access to land, credit and marketing facilities.

24. Many things affect the health and well-being of young people. These include drug abuse and narcotic dependence; sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS; a number of communicable diseases; abuse of alcohol; use of tobacco products; early marriage and pregnancy; abortion; accidents and injuries caused by excessive foolhardiness; and nutritional deficiencies. Health services do not always recognize the special health needs of young people and fail to promote comprehensive and appropriate solutions, including systems of primary health care that reach the whole population, combating malnutrition, controlling communicable diseases, promoting national AIDS prevention programmes, promoting mass immunization against a number of preventable diseases, improving sanitation and safe water supplies, training health personnel and inviting youth to participate in activities and decision-making.

25. The use of narcotic drugs has spread to such an extent that it now poses a threat not only to the health but also to the security of nations. A particularly disturbing feature is that the drug-dependent population is getting younger. Moreover, the use among young people of unsterilized syringes for injecting intravenous drugs has contributed to the spread of the HIV virus, threatening the health and survival of individual drug users and potentially increasing infection throughout the population. Young people are also involved as drug dealers and traffickers, often for economic reasons; increasing crime rates and violence are, in many cases, attributed to young people using drugs. Many Governments recognize the need to cooperate in the fight against the illicit production of and traffic in drugs. Not enough emphasis has been placed, however, on primary programmes to prevent drug consumption by, for example, integrating prevention education into school curricula. Many programmes of prevention, as well as treatment and rehabilitation facilities, have unfortunately ignored the population subgroups among whom drug abuse is often greatest, such as school drop-outs and the growing number of homeless young people.

26. The deteriorating environment is a matter of global concern. Resources are rapidly being exploited to meet current needs with little regard for the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Without environmental protection and conservation, the options available to young people will be bleak. New approaches are necessary to tackle this problem, which is one of the principal concerns of young people the world over. The young have to be made clearly aware of the dangers threatening the environment and must be taught the concepts of environmentally sound life-styles. They should be involved in setting and implementing environmental policies for the development of an integrated and environmentally sound approach to development.

B. Programme activities

27. The Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, designated by the General Assembly in its resolution 41/97 as the focal point for youth matters within the United Nations system, geared its activities during the reporting period towards the commemoration, in 1995, of the tenth anniversary of the International Youth Year: Participation, Development, Peace. A two-pronged approach, including substantive as well as promotional objectives, has been designed.

28. The main substantive objective for the tenth anniversary is to develop, in compliance with the terms of General Assembly resolution 45/103, a world youth programme of action towards the year 2000 and beyond. The programme of action will be based on a review and appraisal of the progress achieved and obstacles encountered in the implementation of the guidelines for further planning and suitable follow-up in the field of youth. In response to Economic and Social Council resolution 1991/11, one of the main promotional objectives is to compile a calendar of activities covering preparatory, promotional and informational activities to mark the tenth anniversary.

29. At the same time, the Centre has continued to promote the dissemination and implementation of the existing guidelines; to this end, it has, among other things, helped Governments and national mechanisms on youth to enhance their capacities for youth work by providing policy guidance, information, technical expertise, operational support and advisory services. The Centre has also continued to promote interagency collaboration and cooperation with youth and youth-related non-governmental organizations.

30. Reports of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly have been prepared on policies and programmes involving youth (A/46/360 and A/47/349). They provide, inter alia, an overview of the situation of youth, trend analyses of the implementation of the guidelines, a summary of approaches to and proposals for the preparation of the draft world youth programme of action towards the Year 2000 and beyond by Member States, the United Nations system and the non-governmental sector, as well as an overview on preparations for the tenth anniversary of the International Youth Year.

31. In addition to its research on youth issues, the Centre has completed two technical publications, entitled The Global Situation of Youth in the 1990s: Trends and Prospects and Youth and AIDS: Strategy on Information and Educational Programmes for AIDS Prevention and Control.

32. Two international meetings on youth have been organized. The Youth Forum of the United Nations System was convened from 27 to 29 May 1991, in cooperation with several international youth non-governmental platforms and coordination bodies. The basic purpose of the Forum was to exchange experiences and to solicit the views of non-governmental youth organizations on means of strengthening channels of communication between the United Nations system and youth and youth organizations. The Forum also developed suggestions for joint projects and elaborated proposals for inclusion in a world youth programme of action. The Interregional Consultative Meeting: Working Group for a World Youth Programme of Action Towards the Year 2000 and Beyond was convened at Vienna from 9 to 13 December 1991. It was attended by nine international specialists in the field of youth planning and programming, who drew up the draft world youth programme of action (E/CN.5/1993/10).

33. The Centre has strengthened channels of communication with youth organizations by providing substantive and technical assistance to the Vienna NGO Committee on Youth. Non-governmental organizations have contributed to the work of the United Nations by drawing attention to youth issues, suggesting ideas and programmes to improve the situation of youth, and disseminating information to promote an informed understanding about the aims and activities of the United Nations system.

34. The eighth meeting of the informal interagency working group on youth at the technical level was held at Vienna on 30 and 31 May 1991. It adopted a number of recommendations for promoting a comprehensive and integrated approach to youth issues within the United Nations system, and ensuring effective and intensified cooperation among the youth-related organizations and agencies of the United Nations system during the preparations for the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the International Youth Year.

35. Global awareness of the aims and objectives of the tenth anniversary of the Year is being promoted through two regular youth publications (the Youth Information Bulletin and the United Nations Youth Newsletter), as well as through a series of information circulars. In cooperation with the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat, a leaflet on interagency cooperation in the field of youth has been published, entitled "The United Nations for Youth: Participation, Development, Peace"; the text was prepared by the members of the interagency working group on youth. A directory of centres and institutes engaged in youth research has also been published.

36. As part of its technical cooperation activities, the Centre is continuing, through the United Nations Youth Fund, to support youth-related activities in developing countries, with emphasis on the least developed countries. Financial constraints meant that only two projects were supported during the period up to October 1992; as of 31 December 1991, the balance of the Fund stood at US$ 134,191.

III. AGEING

A. Summary of substantive issues

37. When today's children reach the age of 60, in the decade after the year 2050, they will be joining a major population group, the old. Historically having constituted 3-5 per cent of the population, people aged 60 years and above are projected to constitute 20-25 per cent of the world's population from the middle of the next century. At that time, many demographers expect population growth to stabilize and population age-structures in the present developed and developing countries to converge.

38. As populations age, social, economic and political structures are affected. The task of adjusting policies accordingly will present a special challenge for countries where the proportion of older persons is at present small but is generally projected to grow most rapidly in the coming years.

39. In developed countries, the emphasis in government policy is shifting to the provision of opportunities for self-help within adjusted pension and welfare systems and the improvement of community services for frail elderly people. Two opposing trends regarding work and retirement are in evidence:

early retirement as this becomes financially viable; and staying at work beyond "pensionable age" for social reasons. The implications for society are equally contradictory: early retirement creates opportunities for younger workers while a longer time-span in retirement tends to place added financial burdens on public pension systems. While the debate continues, "retirement à la carte", with flexible and varied approaches to retirement, is becoming more widespread. The approach envisages, inter alia, gradual withdrawal from the workforce; training for new jobs; incentives for voluntary and community work; and participation in international development work.

40. The high and rising cost of health care is a major policy challenge in developed countries. Among the social measures to contain costs, the concept of healthy ageing has made some headway. Programmes are aimed at younger population groups, cautioning against various forms of destructive behaviour, including excessive alcohol and tobacco consumption, unhealthy diets and sedentary life-styles.

41. The very old are now the fastest growing population group in the world, while the numbers of the middle-aged care-giving population group are showing a relative decrease; also, more women, the traditional family care-givers, work outside the home and have less time to care for frail elderly people. One popular response to this growing problem, community care, is nevertheless difficult to organize. It requires a high degree of cooperation among family members, volunteers, social workers, hospital staff and personnel in "sheltered housing". For example, barrier-free housing that is provided with community services, combined with special services such as targeted transportation, have enabled those who are frail and elderly to remain independent for longer periods. Despite the complexities, community care is often more appropriate and generally preferred to institutionalization. But it is not a cheap alternative: unless there is appppropriate training and adequate financial support, community care may well become a euphemism for family care, in which a disproportionate burden is carried by women.

42. Two responses to population ageing have emerged in developing countries in recent years: mainstreaming and self-help. In view of the scarcity of resources and competing claims, many special programmes for the ageing may not be considered a priority. But the concerns of older people have been responded to and their needs met by including an "ageing component" in mainstream development efforts. Other programmes have emphasized the value of helping older persons to help themselves and the various ways this could be best achieved, through assistance to the family and community to better help its own older members.

B. Programme activities

43. Four plenary meetings of the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session were devoted to an international conference on ageing to consolidate a set of targets on ageing for the year 2001 and to celebrate on an appropriate global scale the tenth anniversary of the International Plan of Action on Ageing (see A/47/PV.39-A/47/PV.42). At that time, the Secretary-General gave testimonials to the International Federation on Ageing and the International Association of Gerontology, both noted for their outstanding support to the United Nations Programme on Ageing.

44. At its 42nd plenary meeting, the General Assembly adopted its Proclamation on Ageing (General Assembly resolution 47/5, annex), in which it underscored

the political will of Governments to address the issue in the next 10 years. The Assembly, inter alia, decided to observe the year 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons. It also adopted, in its resolution 47/86, a set of eight global targets on ageing for the year 2001. The global targets are intended to provide a broad, pragmatic and collaborative programme of action with a view to generating international support for setting and reaching national targets. Ways are suggested of integrating the issue of ageing into mainstream development programmes and into the major events of the next decade. It is proposed that a global network of senior volunteers for social and economic development be established and closer collaboration be facilitated among non-governmental organizations as well as within the United Nations system. The targets, which reflect modest but feasible measures, depend on cooperation among diverse agencies.

45. Both the Proclamation on Ageing and the global targets are intended to support the development of a practical strategy on ageing for the decade up to the year 2001. At the same time, the United Nations Principles for Older Persons (General Assembly resolution 46/91, annex) and the International Plan of Action on Ageing 2/ continue to provide the conceptual framework for activities. The current status of national activities is reported in the third review and appraisal of the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing (E/CN.5/1993/7).

46. The Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations focal point on ageing, has sought to promote cooperation within the United Nations system, and between the United Nations and different interested parties. During the period under review, three reports of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly were prepared: a report on international cooperation on ageing for 1992 and beyond (A/46/361); a report on global targets on ageing for the year 2001: a practical strategy (A/47/339); and a report on implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing (A/47/369).

47. Over the period under review, in order to disseminate relevant information on ageing, the Centre has prepared triennial issues of the Bulletin on Ageing and has distributed them to government offices as well as to various non-governmental organizations, research institutions and interested individuals.

48. The fourth Ad hoc Interagency Meeting on Ageing was convened at Vienna from 21 to 22 February 1991. At the meeting, a number of recommendations were adopted on the International Day for the Elderly (1 October), on the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, and on the identification of targets on ageing and the means of reaching them.

49. The Centre initiated programmes of cooperation with the China National Committee on Ageing and HelpAge International, and collaborated with the International Federation on Ageing; the American Association of Retired Persons; Bridges: SSM International Center on Aging; and others. It has continued to cooperate in training initiatives with the International Institute on Aging in Malta. Special efforts are being made to support the African Society of Gerontology. The Centre supported the activities of the committees of non-governmental organizations devoted to ageing at Headquarters and at Vienna. As part of the observance of the International Day for the Elderly, on 1 October 1992, the Vienna NGO Committee on Ageing, assisted by the Centre, organized a series of events at Vienna, including a symposium entitled "There is a Future in Ageing".

50. With funding from an earmarked grant from the Government of Germany to the Trust Fund for Ageing, a seminar on age-care activity in eastern and central Europe was organized by the Centre in cooperation with HelpAge International and the American Association of Retired Persons, and convened at Vienna from 25 to 28 November 1992. Discussions, which involved participants from countries of the region, focused on progress and obstacles to the development of non-governmental activities for the ageing in the newly-emerging market economies of eastern and central Europe.

51. As part of its activities to promote intergenerational cooperation, the Centre helped to organize and participated in the conference, "Growing Together", sponsored by the Ministry of Citizenship, Office for Seniors' Issues, of the province of Ontario and held at Toronto in June 1992.

52. The Centre is continuing to implement the research project entitled "Developmental Implications of Demographic Change: Global Population Ageing", funded mainly by the United Nations Population Fund with support from the Government of Sweden. The data obtained from the first stage of the research - in Chile, the Dominican Republic, Sri Lanka and Thailand - are being analysed and promise to contribute to "productive ageing" by identifying the actual roles, relations and contributions of older persons to family and community.

53. Efforts to raise funds for technical cooperation activities are continuing. The United Nations Trust Fund for Ageing and the newly established independent Banyan Fund Association: A World Fund for Ageing are the main fund-raising tools. During the period between January 1991 and October 1992, the Trust Fund for Ageing provided in grants a total of US$ 165,500 for 14 projects. As of 31 December 1991, the Trust Fund had a balance of approximately US$ 266,440.

IV. DISABLED PERSONS

A. Summary of substantive issues

54. An assessment of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons reveals that, despite noticeable progress in many countries, persons with disabilities are still discriminated against and live in precarious situations of isolation and neglect. Particularly during periods of economic difficulty, structural adjustment and consequent reduction of public spending, social programmes, including those targeted towards persons with disabilities, have been squeezed.

55. While all the expectations aroused during the Decade may not have been fulfilled, the period was nevertheless a time of sensitization and awareness-raising. Several promising and sustainable processes were initiated. As a result, data on the extent of disability have been improved. It has also been recognized that there is an increased incidence of disability with advancing age. This fact, when combined with the accelerating rate of ageing of many societies, has led to the realization that disability issues are indeed a concern of everyone in society. Furthermore, during the Decade, the focus of activities has shifted from prevention of disability and individually-centred rehabilitation towards emphasis on the right of people with disabilities to equal opportunities as full citizens and members of their communities.

56. Particularly during the second half of the Decade, the focus gradually shifted from speaking about disabilities to speaking about the abilities of

persons with functional limitations. Consequently, the role of physically, socially or psychologically inaccessible environments is being recognized as the source of handicaps, namely, disadvantage related to impairment. The strong and visible advocacy role provided by organizations of disabled persons has resulted in increased participation and representation of disabled persons, not just in those organizations, but also in various international settings, such as in the delegations of Member States to intergovernmental meetings.

57. A key feature of the current discussion of disability has been an emphasis on the right of people with disabilities to enjoy independence and self-determination to the same extent as their peers. While prevention of avoidable disablement and rehabilitation are necessary preconditions to equal opportunity, it is being realized that equality will not result without a certain societal adaptation to the needs and differences present among all its members, be they a result of age, sex, ethnic origin or ability.

58. In order to achieve such "a society for all", an integrated policy approach has been called for, inter alia, by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1991/9. Such an approach has already been adopted by several Governments as a cost-effective measure to mainstream disability issues and to provide persons with disabilities channels for integration into mainstream activities.

59. The conceptual and ideological developments, the striving for empowerment by persons with disabilities themselves, the demographic trends and successful models have created a positive and progressive awareness concerning disabled persons. The challenge for the 1990s is to translate this awareness into action as requested by the General Assembly in its resolutions 45/91 and 46/96 and the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1991/9.

B. Programme activities

60. The General Assembly at its forty-seventh session devoted four of its plenary meetings (see A/47/PV.39-A/47/PV.42) to marking the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons. The special plenary meetings culminated in the proclamation by the Assembly of 3 December as the International Day of Disabled Persons (resolution 47/3). Also during the meetings, testimonials were given by the Secretary-General to 11 organizations and individuals noted for their outstanding support to the work of the United Nations in the field of disability.

61. During the period under review, reports of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly were prepared on the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (A/46/366) and of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (A/47/415).

62. The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Promotion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons continued to promote and encourage the objectives of the Decade and the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons through the issuance of information circulars and presentations to various meetings and gatherings.

63. In central and eastern Europe, activities by the Office of the Special Representative helped the disabled community to develop and strengthen its organizations, to establish a working relationship with the appropriate

government authorities, to conduct activities to promote awareness of issues and problems, and to become more financially independent, through the provision of information and assistance.

64. Responding to requests from the disabled community of the former Yugoslavia, the Office of the Special Representative, in cooperation with UNDP, initiated fact-finding missions to the area and formulated project proposals for submission to appropriate officials.

65. Responding to requests from organizations of disabled persons for a cooperating mechanism on issues of common concern, the Office of the Special Representative continued its efforts to establish an international disability foundation and centre. The Foundation was established at Geneva in September 1992 and work is proceeding to secure space for a centre.

66. An expert meeting was organized by the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs. It was held at Vancouver from 15 to 29 April 1992, with the Government of Canada as host, its primary objective being the drawing up of a long-term strategy to implement the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons to the year 2000 and beyond. The following priority areas were identified as the main focus of the strategy: legislation and governing mechanisms; community-based rehabilitation; independent living; human rights; economic independence; and the creation of an effective international mechanism to coordinate and monitor activities after 1992. (For the report of the meeting, see document E/CN.5/1993/4.)

67. A key feature of the long-term strategy should be to support the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and the proposed standard rules on the equalization of opportunities for disabled persons by suggesting necessary accompanying measures at all levels.

68. In the course of three meetings, the ad hoc open-ended working group to elaborate standard rules on the equalization of opportunities for disabled persons, established by resolution 32/2 of the Commission for Social Development on the recommendation of the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1990/26, fulfilled its mandate to draft standard rules on equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities. The draft rules are designed to ensure the full integration into society of persons with disabilities and underscore the guiding principle of the United Nations disability programme by setting standards to develop an environment fully acceptable to persons with disabilities instead of forcing them to adapt to a hostile environment. (For the report of the working group, see document E/CN.5/1993/5.)

69. In cooperation with the Government of Swaziland and the Swaziland National Society for the Handicapped, the Centre also organized a consultative expert meeting on national disability legislation for developing countries in the southern African subregion, which took place at Mbabane, Swaziland, from 6 to 8 April 1992. The Centre also organized the Symposium on Child and Youth Disabilities, held at Vienna on 18 May 1992, in collaboration with the Vienna-based Non-Governmental Organization Committee on Disabled Persons.

70. Interagency meetings on the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons were convened and reports on the meetings issued in both 1991 and 1992. These meetings were preceded by two consultative meetings of non-governmental organizations, which provided inputs into the interagency meetings.

71. Five issues of the Disabled Persons Bulletin, including the special end-of-Decade issue, were published during the period under review. The Centre and the Department of Public Information prepared a system-wide publication to mark the end of the Decade of Disabled Persons. The publication, entitled United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons: A Decade of Accomplishment (1983-1992), 3/ illustrates through stories and photographs some of the experiences gained and the successful approaches taken by the United Nations system during the Decade. An abbreviated version of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons was prepared, as was an information kit intended for the meetings of the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session that were devoted to the subject of disability.

72. As part of the activities to mark the end of the Decade of Disabled Persons, the Centre assisted in a cultural exchange programme for the China Disabled People's Art Troupe with interested Governments and organizations of disabled persons in four European countries. The Centre also collaborated in the production of a poster with the theme "Towards a Society for All". Designed by a well-known Austrian artist, it is a collage of pictures of disabled persons of all ages and nationalities engaged in various activities.

73. The Centre is working on the Clearinghouse Database on Disability-Related Information (CLEAR) project. A workshop was held from 5 to 6 October 1992 in order to exchange views on the structure, direction and strategies for the development of CLEAR. Presentations of systems already in existence were made by representatives of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and by representatives of the United Nations system, who agreed, inter alia, that periodic consultative meetings should be organized in order to exchange views on the development of the various systems.

74. The General Assembly, at its forty-seventh session, endorsed a recommendation of the Economic and Social Council to continue the operation of the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons after 1992 and to rename it the United Nations Voluntary Fund on Disability, with new terms of reference. It requested the Secretary-General to explore diversified funding arrangements to support and strengthen the Fund on Disability, involving not only Member States, but also the private sector. During the period between January 1991 and October 1992, the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons had provided in grants a total of US$ 556,700 for 42 projects. As of 31 December 1991, the Fund had a balance of approximately US$ 2,560,230 (including special-purpose contributions by Canada, Finland, Norway and Sweden).

75. During the reporting period, various missions were undertaken by staff of the Centre: to consult with a cross-section of organizations of disabled persons in order to reflect the views of persons with disabilities in the preparation of the long-term strategy (Canada); to visit the Morteau section of the Association départementale des amis et parents d'enfants inadaptés (ADAPEI) and the Centre d'aide par le travail (CAT) (France); to join with UNDP, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Swedish Organization of the Handicapped International Aid Foundation (SHIA), to analyse the situation of disabled persons in Ghana, formulate a national disability programme and identify resources to support development and implementation of the programme; to join with UNDP, the World Health Organization (WHO) and non-governmental organizations to help the Government of Guatemala to formulate and strengthen a national disability programme; and to assist the Government of Nepal in

formulating a national training programme for strengthening the national coordinating mechanism and helping organizations of disabled persons in identifying their training needs.

V. THE FAMILY

A. Summary of substantive issues

76. Since the beginning of the last decade, social policy has increasingly focused on the family as a social unit. Families, as well as family forms, structures and functions, have been undergoing changes due to numerous socio-economic and cultural factors. The ability of many families to perform their functions properly has often been affected. Efforts should be made to consider the impact on families of various social policies and development activities and steps taken to formulate and implement family-sensitive policies covering a broad range of specific problems that affect families. At the same time, while families are capable of playing an important role as agents of development and constructive change in society, because of the intimate nature of family relationships, negative behaviour or exploitation may be tolerated within families. Social policy should seek to educate and inform people on family behaviour in order to prevent practices detrimental to the individual and the society.

77. To increase awareness of family issues among Governments and the private sector and to increase action in support of families, the General Assembly, in its resolution 44/82, proclaimed 1994 as the International Year of the Family, with the theme "Family: resources and responsibilities in a changing world". A set of basic principles and objectives was endorsed and a programme for the preparation and observance of the Year approved for implementation.

B. Programme activities

78. Various substantive and organizational activities are being carried out by the secretariat for the International Year of the Family, in close cooperation with Governments, the United Nations system, other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and the private sector. A detailed description of the state of preparations for the International Year of the Family is contained in the report of the Secretary-General to the Commission (E/CN.5/1993/3).

Notes

1/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1989, Supplement No. 7 (E/1989/25), chap. I, sect. D.

2/ See Report of the World Assembly on Ageing, Vienna, 26 July-6 August 1982 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.82.I.16), chap. VI, sect. A.

3/ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.92.I.13.